



DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT

Department of Communication

News

For Immediate Release

DATE: October 10, 2017

FROM: Deacon David Montgomery
Diocese of Davenport

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RE: Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award

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Director of Social Action and Catholic Charities

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Award Presented by Bishop Thomas Zinkula Sunday, October 22, 2017, 2:00 P.M.

Christ the King Chapel, St. Ambrose University

518 W. Locust Street, Davenport, Iowa

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Dr. Widad will meet with the media immediately following the event.

Dr. Widad Akreyi is a Danish health expert, author and human rights activist of Kurdish ancestry who cofounded the human rights organization Defend International.

Born in Aqrah, Kurdistan region, Iraq, in 1969, she fled with her family to Mosul five years later to avoid the Iraq government's offensive against Kurds. Violations of human rights that occurred during that and other offensives are believed to have shaped her life. She is said to be the first young woman of Middle Eastern descent to engage in advocacy efforts related to illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, gender-based violence, disarmament and international security.

"Dr. Widad is an incredible addition to the list of Pacem Award winners," said Kent Ferris, the Diocese of Davenport's social action director who oversees the interfaith coalition. "She became involved early in her life in responding to human rights violations that were happening around her, courageously chronicling the atrocities. And even after obtaining her Ph.D. in global health and cancer epidemiology as a young adult, her life work remains focused on human rights. She is younger than many of the recent award recipients. I think this is based partly on her life experiences. And I also strongly believe that Dr. Widad is part of an emerging cohort group that is responding to the great injustices of our present day."

An eyewitness to Saddam Hussein's chemical attacks and a deadly campaign officially recognized as genocide against the Kurds in 1988, Widad has referred to those atrocities as "the worst time of my life." (<http://widad.org/about-widad-akreyi/>) Dr. Widad was forced to leave her homeland in 1991 because of her peace activism and political affiliations. She sought political asylum in Denmark, where she enrolled in language studies and eventually earned a master's degree in genetics and genomics and a PhD in global health and cancer epidemiology. She has served as a clinical geneticist at the Royal Hospital in Copenhagen, researching inherited diseases.

Dr. Akreyi has created partner agreements with like-minded, social justice organizations. She launched campaigns to defend the rights of writers, civil society activists, children, women's rights defenders, and prisoners on death row and on hunger strikes. She also has years of experience in intercultural communication and peace and international conventions. She is a recipient of the Fellowship of Reconciliation Peace Award and received a Special Prize from the National Organization for Future Generations for bridging the gap between cultures.



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Previous award recipients include Martin Luther King, Jr.; Dorothy Day; Mother Teresa; Archbishop Desmond Tutu; Eileen Egan; Cesar Chávez; and Daniel Berrigan, SJ.

Award co-sponsors: Diocese of Davenport, St. Ambrose University, Augustana College, The Catholic Messenger, Churches United of the Quad City Area, Islamic Center of Quad Cities, Quad Cities Interfaith, Jewish Federation of the Quad Cities, Muslim Community of the Quad Cities, Congregation of the Humility of Mary, Sisters of St. Benedict, Sisters of St. Francis (Dubuque, Iowa), Sisters of St. Francis (Clinton, Iowa).

For more information about the Pacem in Terris Award, go to <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/pacem-in-terris>

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